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ABSTRACT

The Ethnic Heritage Learning Center, designed to increase the reading skills of elementary students who are educationally and economically disadvantaged, is described in this paper. The major goal of the Center was to provide supplementary remedial reading instruction. In addition to the 250 students who were selected as a target group, the Center also served approximately 1000 students from other schools in the district who came to the Center for two day workshops. Approximately 60 students were serviced at the Center each day with the primary activities revolving around learning to read through the study of the Hispanic and African cultures. Four paraprofessionals assisted the teaching staff in instructional activities, management activities, and special enrichment activities in this multimedia, multicultural project. Materials that emphasized the ethnic and cultural heritage of the black and Puerto Rican students served by the Center, were developed. The major conclusion of this evaluation is that the Center's activities are effective in increasing the reading skills of the participants. It was recommended that the target population for the following year be set at 25-350 students who would visit the Center at least four times per month and that a measure of specific knowledge gained as a result of participation be developed and implemented. It was also suggested that a measure of English language proficiency be used as a pre and post-measure for those participants who have a diagnosed weakness in this area. (Author/AM)

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The Ethnic Heritage Learning Resource Center

1975-1976

James J. Hennessy

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An Evaluation of Selected New York City Umbrella Programs funded under a Special Grant of the New York State Legislature performed for the Board of Education of the City of New York for the 1975-1976 school year

UD017137

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Chapter I

Ethnic Heritage Learning Resource Center

Program Description

The Ethnic Heritage Learning Resource Center, located at 708 East Tremont Avenue, Bronx, New York, was established to help enhance the reading skills of students who are both educationally and economically disadvantaged. By using paraprofessionals who assist teachers in an interdisciplinary approach to ethnic studies, it was expected that students participating in the project would improve their reading, and become further motivated to pursue academic courses.

The Center is located in a renovated movie theater that is adjacent to the district offices on East Tremont Avenue. The balcony area of the theater was selected as the main area, and a multi-level Center, composed of several discrete ethnic interest areas, was developed. The Center contains a mini-theater; Puerto Rican sala and plaza; African market place; African village; caves; planetarium; media area; aquarium; and an Art workshop housed in a large cafeteria. By utilizing the steep balcony area, participants working in each of the areas are not distracted by activities in adjacent areas.

The target population with whom the paraprofessionals would work most closely, was originally planned to be 2000 students from the 15 schools in the district who had scored at levels C through F on a scale of Pupil's Ability to Speak English. This was changed in December, 1975 so that the target population was set at 250 students in grades 4, 5, and 6 from 3 schools who met the above stated criterion. This change was made because the project staff believed that

the intensive, direct services of the Center could best be provided to a smaller select group. In addition to the 250 students who were selected as the target group who were to receive the most intensive effort, the Center also served approximately 1000 students from other schools in the district, who came to the Center for two day workshops. These students did not return to the Center on any regular basis, but used the facility on a one-time basis. It was thought that these two day experiences would heighten interest in exploring cultural heritage in activities which could be carried out at the home schools. Thus, two groups of students participated in the Center: the 250 selected for intensive efforts, and the larger group who received a less intensive program. This evaluation focused on the group of 250 participants. The Center provided 4 educational assistants (paraprofessionals), 4 teachers, funded through tax levy funds, and a project director who was also funded through tax levy funds.

Approximately 60 students are serviced at the Center each day with the primary activities revolving around learning to read through the study of the Hispanic and African cultures. Subject areas of History, Geography, Literature, Economics, and Art and Drama were studied using several cultural perspectives. It was expected that the cultural attractions would encourage participants to grasp reading skills and to more diligently apply them in learning situations.

In order to accomplish the goals of the program, four paraprofessionals worked in close conjunction with the project coordinator and the teaching staff. The roles of the paraprofessionals were integral to the operation of the Center as they assisted in forming instructional groups within the Center, worked on an individualized

basis with many of the children, maintained pupil records, assisted with the many different media devices utilized in instruction, and visited participants at schools in the district to further assist these participants in the acquisition of reading skills and a greater understanding of their cultural heritage.

The participants in the program were scheduled for a series of activities designed to stimulate interest in Reading through the study of different cultural groups. Science activities, which included astronomy, earth sciences, and geography, focused on understanding scientific phenomenon by relating these events and phenomenon to the immediate worlds of the participants. For example, when studying astronomy, the starting point for the slide presentation were scenes from the East Tremont Avenue area of the Bronx, so that participants could more directly see the relationship between the subject matter and their own environments.

Reading activities in history, literature, drama, and economics were similarily related directly to the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of the participants. The children had the opportunity, for example, to create puppets which represented famous Black and Puerto Rican historical figures. They then read biographies of these famous people and had the opportunity to role play these individuals in a minitheater or kiosk set up in the Puerto Rican plaza area. All of these multisensory, multimedia activities were planned to encourage an interest in learning through the development of reading and language skills.

The Center has been in operation throughout the current school year.

Chapter II

Evaluation Procedures

This chapter contains a description of the objectives of the program as well as a description of the evaluation objectives that were included in the evaluation design. The first series of objectives represent those which were stated in the original project application. In December, 1975 these objectives were revised. The revisions are listed and the reasons for the revisions are cited. The evaluation objectives were based on the revised program objectives, and not on the original ones.

Program Objectives - Original

1. Pupil participants in the reading component of the program attending 60% or more of the scheduled sessions will improve in reading achievement significantly beyond anticipation as measured by the pre-post administration of a standardized reading achievement test such as the Metropolitan and the implementation of a historical regression formula.
2. Pupils participating in the spoken English component of the program attending 60% or more of the scheduled sessions will advance one step on the scale of Pupil's Ability to Speak English above their pre-test rating.
3. Pupils participating in the Ethnic Heritage component of the program will improve or maintain their concept of self-worth and/or self-image as measured on a pre-post administration of

an appropriate self-concept scale to be provided or designed by the evaluation agency.

4. The program, as actually implemented, will coincide with the program as described in the proposal and any subsequent modifications or addenda.

Program Objectives - Revised

1. Pupil participants in the reading component of the program attending 60% or more of the scheduled sessions will improve in reading achievement significantly beyond anticipation as measured by the pre-post administration of the N.Y.C. Reading Test and implementation of a historical regression formula.
2. Deleted
3. Deleted
4. The program, as actually implemented, will coincide with the program as described in the proposal and any subsequent modifications or addenda.

The second and third objectives were deleted as the project staff felt that reading was the most critical skill to focus on, and while the project functions in a bilingual environment, the resources of the project could most effectively be focused on Reading.

Evaluation Objectives

Evaluation Objectives #1

To determine whether the reading scores of students participating in the project showed a significant gain between the real post-test scores and the anticipated post-test scores.

1.1 Subjects: All students designated as target children who attend at least 60% of the scheduled session comprised the treatment group.

1.2 Methods and Procedures: The appropriate level of the N.Y.C. Reading Test was administered twice; once at the beginning of the project and again during the month of April, 1976. Attendance data were used to identify students on whom data analyses were computed. Pretest and post-test results were assembled by the project coordinator on forms provided by the evaluator.

1.3 Data Analysis: Data were analyzed by the "Real (treatment) Post-test vs. Anticipated (without treatment) Post-test" design.

Evaluation Objective #2

To determine whether the program, as actually implemented, coincided with the program as described in the proposal and any subsequent modifications or addenda. To accomplish this objective, the evaluator visited the project site on 2/18, 3/22, 3/29, 4/5, 5/3, and 5/10, 1976 and observed the activities of the project. During these visits, the evaluator interviewed the project coordinator, teaching staff, paraprofessionals, and student participants. The various pupil progress records, administrative records, and instructional materials were examined to determine if they were in accord with statements made about them in the original and revised proposals.

Chapter III

The Findings

The pertinent findings of the evaluation are presented below, following the format outlined in the evaluation design.

Evaluation Objectives #1

Pre and post-test scores on the New York City Reading Test were analyzed to determine if the stated objective was met. Test data were collected on 235 participants who came from four elementary schools in the district. These students represent those who attended at least 60% of the sessions scheduled for them. Approximately 15 additional students attended this number of sessions, but post-test scores were not available for them. Several of these 15 moved out of the district in the Spring of 1976, several others were absent from school on the days on which the post-test was scheduled. Since the proposal staff was not invloved in the actual testing, they could not get make-up scores for those youngsters. Thus, the total number of complete data sets was only 235, instead of the projected 250.

The results of the historical regression analysis are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in that table, the pretest mean for the group was 4.08. This figure represents the average score for 36

fifth graders and 199 sixth graders who comprised the target group. Because of the limited resources of the Center, when the target population was reduced from 2000 to 250, the decision was made to focus on older elementary children who, when they moved on to secondary schools, may not find special remedial programs available.

The anticipated post-test mean for this group was 4.51. This figure was obtained by calculating the number of months of schooling for fifth and sixth graders at the time of the post-test. Since all of them were tested in April 1975, the fifth graders who were then in the fourth grade had 38 months of school, and the sixth graders, who were then fifth graders, had 48 months of school at the time of the pretest. Post-testing was completed by mid-April of the present year, and the participants began the project in late September. Thus at the time of post-testing they had been in treatment for seven months. The real or actual post-test mean for the group was 4.82. Thus the gain as a result of the project was 3.2 months. The results of the t-test found a t of 4.08, which for this size sample was significant beyond the .01 level of confidence. It can be concluded, therefore that the stated objective has been met as a highly significant mean difference was found.

Table 1

Pre-test, Anticipated Post-test, and Real Post-test Means, Historical Regression Data, and t-tests for the Ethnic Heritage Learning Resource Center N = 235

Pre-test	4.08
Anticipated Post-test	4.51
Real Post-test	4.82
Sum of Differences	76.01
Sum of Squared Differences	274.410
t	4.08
p	.01

Evaluation Objective #2

The program, as actually implemented, coincided with the program as described in the proposal and subsequent modifications. Observations and interviews were used to assess this objective. In order to fully analyze it, the specific activities of the paraprofessionals, as outlined in the proposal, were observed and verified. Six major activities were planned for the paraprofessionals. They were to:

1. Assist teachers in grouping children for instruction
2. Help teachers maintain individual progress files for participants

3. Assist in the development and maintenance of Center routines
4. Use their special talents and abilities as enrichment resources
5. Provide bilingual services
6. Assist in selection and use of materials.

During site visits the evaluator observed the paraprofessionals performing each of these duties. Specifically they were key personnel in helping students acclimate themselves to the Center. The paraprofessionals took small groups of participants and helped them develop ethnic oriented materials (e.g. puppets) and assisted participants as they read biographies and wrote summaries of these stories. They were actively involved in one-on-one tutoring, and often spent a full class period working with individual youngsters who were having difficulty following directions. They also operated many of the audio visual aids that are prominent features at the Center.

Their bilingual skills were utilized frequently since a large number of the participants spoke and read little English. At the end of each instructional sequence, the paraprofessionals collected the work of each participant, graded and corrected these works, and made notations that were put into each child's folder. These notes served to guide future activities. It was found that the staff of the Center performed all of the activities outlined for them, and did them at a good level of efficiency and effectiveness.

The activities outlined for participants were also performed at a competent level. Reading was definately the primary thrust of the Center, but this was emphasized in novel and interesting ways.

By using materials which placed heavy emphasis on cultural and ethnic concerns, the reading activities were enthusiastically entered into by most participants. The use of ethnic and cultural "interest areas" within the Center (e.g. the Puerto Rican sala and African village) helped to maintain participant interest. As was found with staff activities, all of the activities outlined for participants were provided to them.

It was found, therefore, that this objective was satisfactorily met.

Chapter IV

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The Ethnic Heritage Learning Resource Center was designed to enhance the reading skills of elementary students who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. Four paraprofessionals assisted the teaching staff in instructional activities, management activities, and special enrichment activities in this multimedia oriented, multi cultural Center. The major goal of the Center was to provide supplementary remedial reading instruction in the anticipation that this instruction would significantly increase participants' reading levels. Materials that emphasized the ethnic and cultural heritage of the Black and Puerto Rican students served by the Center, were developed and put into use with the aid of the four paraprofessionals. Activities which also stressed the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the participants were also developed and activated by

these pararrofessionals working with the teaching staff of the Center.

This objective found that the major objective was successfully achieved, in that the post-test mean score in the NYC Reading Test was significantly higher than the anticipated post-test mean. It was also found that the program was implemented in accordance with the original and revised proposal.

The major conclusion deriving from this evaluation is that the Center's activities are effective in enhancing the reading skills of the participants. The decision made in December 1975 to reduce the number of participants probably accounts, in part, for the effectiveness of the Center. By focusing the limited resources of the Center on 250 students, the likelihood of being effective was substantially increased. It could not realistically be expected that four paraprofessionals and four teachers could work effectively with 2000 students, especially if each of these 2000 visited the Center on only one or two occasions.

The decision to eliminate measures of self-concept enhancement was also wisely made. Even if one ignored the psychometric problems involved in the measurement of self-concept, the problem of obtaining valid data were insurmountable, given the limited resources of the Center. In addition, the relationship between knowledge of ethnic and cultural heritage and self-concept has not been established in the literature, making any attempt to relate the two variables tenous at best. The resources of the Center are best directed toward enhancing academic skills, which may be more significant in enhancing self-concept and self-esteem.

Given the findings of this evaluation it is recommended that the project be continued into the next school year. This recommendation is made because of the demonstrated effectiveness of the project during the present year.

The following additional recommendations are also offered:

1. That the target population for next year be set at 25-350 students who will visit the Center at least four times per month.
2. That a measure of specific knowledge gained as a result of participation be developed and implemented. Such a test could measure knowledge of cultural history, geography, literature and economics.
3. That a measure of English language proficiency such as the Language Assessment Battery be used as a pre and post-measure for those participants who have a diagnosed weakness in this area.